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SECONDARY EDUCATION

AT the meeting of the National Educational Association in 1895 the Department of Secondary Education attempted to secure the registration of those present teaching in high schools and academies. The reception committee at the headquarters of the department were repeatedly surprised at the number of high school teachers who asked for explanation of the words, "Secondary Education," on a sign in the reception rooms where they were requested to register. Strange as it may appear, the term was wholly new to numbers of them. Yet it is familiar enough in educational literature. The United States Commissioner of Education has devoted considerable space to Secondary Education, under that specific title, since 1871; and since 1887 there has been such a department of the National Educational Association. These words, however, even yet convey little or no meaning to the general public, and but a vague one to large numbers of teachers.

The period of secondary education, if we define it by subject, overlaps the elementary period below and the college period above, and this fact alone accounts, to a considerable degree, for the lack of an exact connotation. The attempt to begin in the elementary school certain subjects, formerly reserved by custom to the high school or academy, without careful analysis to determine in what measure they properly belong to both, is also responsible for added indefiniteness in the use of this unfortunate word. But the admirable discussion of the relation of elementary to secondary education by the "Committee of Fifteen" fixes as clearly as is possible the line of demarkation as regards both matter and method, and amply suffices as a theoretical guide for what may be safely attempted in practice. There is, however, danger of an assumption on the

part of the public that elementary beginnings in science, mathematics and foreign languages may suffice for a more specialized treatment of the same subjects in the secondary school. The only justifiable hope is that such beginnings may make it possible for the pupil to grasp readily and firmly a more advanced discussion of the same topics and make more rapid progress in them. Indeed the marked characteristic of the secondary school should be a more highly specialized and intensive study of the subjects pursued, keeping pace with the student's growth in years and understanding.

In an ideal scheme of education, even disregarding the question of specialization of instruction, the years that mark distinctively the ripening of the child into manhood and womanhood should be assigned to secondary education. For we know that at this time we are to look for the budding of tastes and capacities which, failing at this time of careful nurture, may wither without fruition. The years from thirteen to eighteen rather than from fifteen to nineteen, from the view point of the physiologist, would better mark the secondary school period.

That this whole period be brought within the watchful observation of a single institution of uniform discipline, I believe to be of vast importance for the preservation and development of the strongest and highest aptitudes of individuals. That this is largely possible of attainment appears from the statistics of secondary schools in Dr. Harris' last report. In public secondary schools, showing an enrollment of 232,950 pupils pursuing the ten characteristic secondary school studies, there were also enrolled 436,855 students. The corresponding figures for private secondary schools were respectively 96,147 and 64,180. The natural tendency everywhere is to unite the eighth grade with the grades above, where the latter are weak in numbers, and I believe it would be helpful to secondary education if this were always done.

But the distinctive feature of secondary education, as distinguished from highly specialized professional training of the

university, is its general character. An analysis even of commercial courses in high schools shows that the work most markedly specialized is very general compared with the work of the expert in any line of accounts. In manual training courses the fundamentals are those of the general high school courses in mathematics, science, and English. The distinctive feature of the manual work is its general training, being in fact general preparation for those who may later specialize along some technical line. I believe it quite as much for the interest of the state to secure to the future cabinetmaker or machinist general skill in handicraft along with his general view of the field of knowledge, as the more extended general education now furnished to the future doctor or lawyer.

A most significant fact regarding secondary schools, especially the public high schools, is the tendency to speak of them and to regard them as colleges for the people. The title often has a more far-reaching significance and a sounder basis in reality than the one who uses the term in local pride can grasp or understand. We need but recall the usual age of graduation from the best American colleges half a century ago to see that, as regards the maturity of their students, the high schools have in a marked degree stepped into the place of the colleges of those days; and that the colleges by raising the standard of admission and by greater specialization of work have moved upward out of their way. In the best class of high schools and academies much of the work of the last year stands side by side and compares favorably with that of the freshman year in college. It is becoming a matter of pardonable pride to high school principals to point to those of their graduates who have anticipated by examination freshman and sophomore studies in American colleges of high standing. Some of the subjects in which this is possible are physics, chemistry, biology, solid geometry, trigonometry, French, and German. Colleges and universities may do much to raise the standard of the high school and to encourage a professional spirit in its teachers by acknowledging this fact and by allowing extra courses that may be taken by a high school stu-

dent above the minimum amount required for admission to be counted towards the A.B. degree. I know of no movement that would go so far to solve the vexatious problem of the relation of secondary school, college, and university as a mutual understanding and agreement between colleges and secondary schools in regard to this matter. The following seems to me to indicate approximately the relation of educational periods in an ideal scheme of education: Elementary, four to twelve years inclusive; secondary, thirteen to seventeen; college, eighteen to twenty; professional or university, twenty-one to twenty-three. Remembering that the average age for entrance at the colleges of Oxford University is seventeen, and that the A.B. degree is granted at twenty, it would seem as though the attempt ought soon to be made to unify the requirements for that degree in our own land.

Is not the time come for a vigorous attack on this and its kindred problems? A vast system of public elementary and secondary instruction, growing yearly more efficient and more ambitious, supported with a loyalty and generosity that no other national institution receives, needs to have its ideals vitalized and encouraged by comradeship with the traditional ideals of the higher education. It must be a real comradeship without suspicion on the one side or patronizing on the other. The mightiness of the struggle to leaven our American democracy with right feeling and right judgment, that the ballot may prove an instrument for the increase of truth and righteousness and not a tool of tyrannous might for their destruction, ought to leave no room for petty feeling about place or rank in this common cause. Signs are not lacking that one of the strongest bonds of national unity is our educational system; for there is no place in education for sectional feeling, for partisan struggles. Active and able organizations exist for the discussion of the problems proposed. The Departments of Higher and Secondary Education of the National Educational Association are already at work upon one. We scarcely realize the power at our disposal in the four great associations of colleges and preparatory schools,

known as the New England, Middle States, North Central, and Southern. The machinery for their interaction and coöperation has yet to be devised, but committees have been appointed looking to this end.

There must, however, come a fuller realization of the principle, that no institution liveth unto itself. During the recent convention of the National Educational Association, a meeting was held of the representatives of these various associations. A professor in one of the oldest and strongest of the southern universities afterwards remarked: "When the southern association was formed, our University did not think best to join. I believe we made a great mistake. Institutions with traditions should not be chary of their presence at these gatherings. If your traditions are worth something for universal use, share them freely with the younger institutions; the giving is not likely to be altogether on one side." Another illustration from the Buffalo convention will suffice to indicate a contrasted spirit, which I believe to be too common. A professor of almost our oldest university described it as a national institution, drawing its students probably from a wider field than any other American university; yet, almost at the same time, he stated its system of entrance examinations was determined simply and absolutely by the course of study decided upon by the university for the freshman and sophomore years. It seems to me that no institution can with justice regard itself as national, unless it shows in its standards for entrance a sympathetic consideration for the problems of secondary education, as they exist nationally, and a certain readiness and willingness to adjust itself to them. The president of the youngest American university also treated the subject of methods of admission. He stated that the university was prepared at its own expense to examine schools; if approved, to make their teachers, in a sense, examiners for the university, to read all papers offered by such teachers from their classes, and to give certificates to successful candidates, whether they desired to enter that university or not. He furthermore expressed the hope that ultimately one plan, one standard might be adopted

by which any boy might enter any college he desired. Is not the latter the spirit that should characterize every American college—a willingness to do everything in its power to increase the number of those seeking higher culture, so far as it can be done without detriment to the standards of sound scholarship?

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